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ABSTRACT

The project of which this paper is a part consists of three steps. The first step (an American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference 2000 paper subtitled "Clearing the Terrain") provided a critical overview of current debates on moral development and education, focusing on the relationship between empirical and theoretical research. The second step, including this paper, is meant to provide an overview of postmodern and poststructural approaches to ethics and morality. The third step will attempt to articulate a postmodern theory of moral education. This paper focuses on the ideas of Zygmunt Bauman and on his book "Postmodern Ethics." The paper explores Bauman's position to consider what his postmodern ethics is about and what it may have to offer the field of moral education. The major part of the paper consists of a systematic reconstruction of his ideas. It shows that one distinctive quality of Bauman's contribution to the overall discussion is that he connects (Levinasian) philosophy with a sociological analysis of modern society and its postmodern "moment." Although Bauman's work has a strong theoretical orientation, the combination of philosophy and sociology gives his writings a practical orientation that is helpful in thinking through the practical "implications" of his approach. The paper's conclusion focuses on what can be learned from Bauman's writings regarding four issues: (1) demarcation of the moral domain; (2) the gap between "is" and "ought," between facts and values; (3) moral motivation and moral action; and (4) moral relativism. Contains 21 references. (BT)

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Towards a Postmodern Theory of Moral Education

Part II: Mapping the Terrain

[Zygmunt Bauman's Postmodern Ethics]

A paper presented at the Annual Meeting
of the American Educational Research Association,
Seattle, April 10-14, 2001.
SIG: Moral Development and Education.

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"Morality is not safe in the hands of reason..."

Zygmunt Bauman (1993, p.247)

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades educational scholarship has been significantly influenced by postmodern and poststructural thought (see, for example, Cherryholmes, 1988; Lather, 1991; Giroux, et al. 1996; Stronach & MacLure, 1997; Peters, 1998). This influence is, however, still remarkably absent in the field of moral development and moral education (for two recent exceptions see Lourenco, 1996; Teo, 1997). This may well be the result of the rather widespread conviction that postmodern and poststructural philosophy is unable to provide support for the moral and political project that education is. Yet both philosophers and educational theorists have recently been arguing -- and to our opinion they have done this in a convincing manner -- that postmodern and poststructural thought should *not* be understood as an expression of relativism and nihilism, but that it is explicitly motivated by moral and political concerns (see, for example, Bauman, 1993; Critchley, 1992; 1999a; 1999b; Biesta, 1995; 1998; Biesta & Egéa-Kuehne, 2001). This raises the question what postmodern and poststructural thought have to offer for the field of moral development and moral education.

In the paper we presented at AERA 2000 (Stams & Biesta, 2000[1]) we embarked on this task by means of a reconstruction and critical analysis of current (empirical) research programs on moral development and education. Our analysis included Kohlberg's stage theory of moral reasoning, Rest's four component model of moral functioning, Blasi's model of the moral self, Gibbs's integrationist sociomoral theory, Gilligan's ethic of care, Eisenberg's approach to prosocial reasoning, Turiel's domain approach of social knowledge, as well as theories of prosocial behavior, moral emotion, moral character, and critical thinking. Kohlberg's theory functioned as our main point of reference, since most of the research in the field can be seen as either a reaction to his position, or a (critical) extension of his approach. Since we were especially interested in the relationship between theoretical and empirical research our focus was on the question of construct validity in empirical research on moral development and education.

We structured our discussion around four issues which, so we argued, are central to contemporary research on moral development and education. These issues are:

[1] the question of the demarcation of the moral domain (What constitutes the moral domain? What counts as moral behavior?);

[2] the question of the relationship between "is" and "ought" (Is there a gap between "is" and "ought"? Can it be bridged? Should it be bridged?);

[3] the question of moral motivation and its relationship to moral action (How to move from cognition to action? Is there a gap between cognition and action? Does cognition precede action?);

[4] the question of moral relativism (Are there standards for morality? If so, how can they be known and how can they be justified? Can we avoid both rigid dogmatism and empty neutrality?).

Our analysis not only revealed the inconclusiveness of many -- if not most -- of the discussions around these four issues. It also became clear that it was not possible to validate central constructs in the research on moral development and education on the basis of the outcome of empirical research alone. Not only did this indicate the need for (further) conceptual investigation and hence for (further) theoretical and philosophical research. It also became clear that conceptualizations define the phenomenon under investigation in such a manner that it is only within the context and on the basis a specific conceptualization (e.g., of what is considered to be included in the moral domain, or of what is considered to count as moral action) that the outcomes of empirical research (often focussing on developmental *processes* "within" a specific conceptualization) could be interpreted and be given meaning.

Our analysis further revealed that many of the problems that we encountered in reconstructing the field could be related to a specific conceptualization of morality and moral action, which itself relied upon a specific conceptualization of human subjectivity and human agency. The problems that we encountered in the discussions about moral action, moral motivation, and moral behavior (issue 3), for example, could all be traced back to a model in which "outer" action is assumed to be caused by "inner" steering mechanisms (such as, for example, cognition). This conception of human subjectivity also played a prominent role in the notions of morality that we discussed in our analysis of the

discussions on the question what constitutes the moral domain (issue 1). This conception also appeared to be influential in the discussions about moral relativism (issue 4).

Not only, then, did our first paper indicate the need for further theoretical, conceptual and philosophical research. It also indicated a certain direction for such investigations in that it suggested that many problems could be traced back to a specific understanding of human subjectivity and agency and morality and ethics more generally -- an understanding that can be characterized as typically *modern*. It made sense, in other words, to explore what a postmodern approach might have to offer.

The overall project of which this paper is a part, consists of three steps. The first step (our AERA-2000 paper subtitled 'Clearing the terrain') provided a critical overview of the current field. The second step in our project (subtitled 'Mapping the terrain') is meant to provide an overview of postmodern and poststructural approaches to ethics and morality. On the basis of this, our third step (subtitled 'Shifting the terrain') will be an attempt to articulate a postmodern theory of moral education.

One of the problems with the second part of the project is that the notions 'postmodern' and 'poststructural' refer to a wide variety of different approaches, positions, theories and ideas, even if restricted to questions about ethics and morality. We decided, therefore, to focus on two recent articulations of a postmodern/poststructural approach to morality and ethics, viz., Zygmunt Bauman's 'postmodern ethics' (Bauman, 1993) and Simon Critchley's 'ethics of deconstruction' (Critchley, 1992; 1999a; 1999b). The reason for this selection is not only that both authors provide articulate and comprehensive approaches to questions about morality and ethics; approaches, moreover, that are clearly postmodern and/or poststructural. Between them they also cover a significant part -- if not the most significant part -- of the postmodern/poststructural philosophical spectrum. Bauman builds explicitly upon the writings of Emmanuel Levinas and (the less known Danish moral philosopher) Knud Løgstrup (see Løgstrup, 1971). The main sources of inspiration for Critchley are Jacques Derrida and, again, Levinas. Moreover, Levinas is an important point of reference for Derrida's own explorations of the ethical possibilities of deconstruction (see Bennington, 2000; Biesta, 1998).

In this paper we focus on the ideas of one of the authors selected, namely Zygmunt Bauman, and on his 'postmodern ethics'.[2] The main aim of the paper is to *explore* Bauman's position in order to get an understanding of what his postmodern ethics is 'about' and what it may have to offer for the field of moral education. The major part of the paper therefore consists of a systematic reconstruction

of his ideas. As we will show, one distinctive quality of Bauman's contribution to the overall discussion is that he connects (Levinasian) philosophy with a sociological analysis of modern society and its postmodern 'moment'. Although Bauman's work has a strong theoretical orientation, the combination of philosophy and sociology gives his writings a rather practical orientation which, as we will suggest in the concluding section of this paper, is particularly helpful in thinking through the practical 'implications' of his approach. Since our aim is to gain from reading Bauman, we will, in the concluding section, primarily focus on what can be learned from Bauman's writings *vis-à-vis* the four issues we identified in our first paper. Our intention at this stage is to provide starting points for a discussion around these issues.

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN'S "POSTMODERN ETHICS"[3]

1. Modern ethics, postmodern morality

The first thing to keep in mind when trying to understand Bauman's position is the distinction he makes between *morality* and *ethics*. For Bauman this is not only a conceptual distinction and a distinction between two different approaches to morality. He also uses the distinction to mark the difference between modern and postmodern.[4]

In terms of their meaning *morality* concerns "the aspect of human thought, feeling and action that pertains to the distinction between 'right and 'wrong'" (Bauman, 1993, p. 4). *Morality* is, in other words, a dimension and possibility of human life. *Ethics*, on the other hand, refers to rules, codes and norms. It is the codification of what counts as moral action; a codification in terms of (universal) laws. Implied in the idea of *ethics* is not only the assumption that it is *possible* to articulate such laws. *Ethics* also expresses a particular belief as to what it is to lead a moral life, viz., the life of obedience to the moral law(s) (Bauman, 1998, p. 75). This view stands in sharp contrast to the view in which the moral life is conceived as a life of choice between right and wrong *without* the guidance -- and subsequent reassurance -- of norms, codes and laws.

According to Bauman these two conceptions of the moral life have a long history in Western culture. In a mythical form they can already be found in the Bible (see ibid., pp. 74-75). The idea of

'morality-without-laws' is the story of Adam and Eve. Initially Adam and Eve were not aware that things could be good or bad. These words first emerged when God casted a critical eye on his creation. After Adam and Even had eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, however, they became 'like God'. But since they did not posses God's omnipotence and omniscience they were able to make mistakes. In this way Adam and Eve became *moral beings* -- beings to whom reality presents itself as good or bad and right or wrong. Beings, moreover, who not only *can* choose but who also *have to* choose.

The idea of *'morality-with-laws'* is the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments. In this story it is told how the people trembled with fear when they heard the thunder and the trumpet blast and saw the lightning and smoke coming from Mount Sinai. They were afraid that if God would speak to them they would die. Yet, as Moses explained to them, this was only God's way of testing his people and make them keep on obeying him so that they would not sin. This story, then, presents the moral life as obeying to the moral laws, i.e., the Ten Commandments, and nothing more than that.

Bauman argues that all theories about morals and morality, whether of a scientific, a theological, a philosophical or a sociological nature, basically follow the pattern of one of these stories (see ibid., pp. 76-77). Most theories follow the pattern of the second story, most of the times on the basis of the "tacit, but virtually exceptionless assumption" that free will expresses itself solely in wrong choices so that, when free, individuals must be prevented from using their freedom to do wrong (see Bauman, 1993, pp. 6-7). Although the first story suggests that morality is the 'drama of choice' (Bauman, 1998, p. 76), Bauman suggests that the most common practice was -- and to a certain extent still is (see below) -- one of reducing choice or, even more, of making choice unnecessary and impossible (see ibid.). The idea of the perfect moral life then becomes that of a life *without* choice and *without* conflict -- or only with a very specific conflict, namely the conflict which emerges from the situation where there are two or more incompatible laws to obey to (see Bauman, 1998, p. 77).

Bauman characterizes modernity as the era of *ethics*, i.e., the era in which it was assumed to be possible to articulate, define and codify what would count as moral behavior. The moral thought and practice of modernity, he writes, "was animated by the belief in the possibility of a *non-ambivalent, non-aporetic code*" (Bauman, 1993, p. 9).

Contrary to common interpretations, Bauman does *not* characterize the modern era as one in

which secularization and the erosion of religious frameworks resulted in individualization. He rather argues that processes of modernization such as industrialization and urbanization "forced men and women into the condition of individuals, who found their lives fragmented, split into many loosely related aims and functions" (Bauman, 1993, p.6). It was *as a result* of this "that an 'all-comprising' idea promoting an unitary vision of the world was unlikely to serve their tasks well and thus capture their imagination" (Bauman, 1993, p. 6).

Modern legislators and moral thinkers believed, however, that the void left by the previous supervision of the Church could be filled with a set of *rational* rules. They believed, in other words, "that *reason* can do what *belief* was doing no more" (Bauman, 1993, p. 6). Consequently modern ethics became *rational* ethics. Modern ethics became a moral code which, not being able to hide any longer behind God's commandments, "would loudly and unashamedly proclaim its 'man-made' provenance" and yet would be "embraced and obeyed by 'all rational human beings'" (Bauman, 1993, p. 6). Modern ethics presented itself as universal, i.e., as a prescription "which compelled every human creature, just for the fact of being a human creature, to recognize it as right and thus to accept it as obligatory" (Bauman, 1993, p. 8). The underlying assumption here was that human nature is *universally* rational. On the basis of this assumption it could in principal be expected that autonomous individuals would choose to obey the (rational) ethical laws -- an idea that was central to the work of Kant (see Bauman, 1998, p. 106).

Although *theoretically* the connection between ethics, human nature and rationality may have been strong, Bauman stresses that the only way in which this constellation would work in practice was when people -- real, 'empirical' people -- would recognize their 'true' nature and would act accordingly. In order for this to happen, true human nature not only had to be presented as existing only '*in potentia*', i.e., as a "possibility not-yet-born" (see Bauman, 1993, p. 26), since, it was only on such a basis that a distinction between the actual preferences of people and their 'real' rational preferences could be made. What also was needed were specific *educational* strategies in order for people to recognize what their true interests are. "(P)eople had to be enlightened as to the standards they were able to meet but unable to discover unaided" (Bauman, 1993, p. 26). "People must be *told* what their true interests are; if they do not listen or appear to be hard of hearing, they must be forced to behave as their *real* interests demand -- if necessary, against their will." (Bauman, 1993, p. 27).

What makes all this thoroughly modern, according to Bauman, is the assumption that although things may not yet be perfect now, we will *eventually* arrive at a situation in which we will have found the "*non-ambivalent, non-aporetic ethical code*" which every rational creature will choose to obey (Bauman, 1993, p.9; see also pp. 24-28; see also Beilharz, 2001, p. 339).

It is precisely the *disbelief* in this possibility, the disbelief in the idea that while things may *not yet* be perfect now, they will be one day, which is distinctly *post*modern (see Bauman, 1993, p. 10). The 'post' here is not meant in a chronological sense, i.e., in the sense of displacing and replacing modernity at the moment when it ends or fades away. It rather is meant to imply "that the long and earnest efforts of modernity have been misguided, undertaken under false pretences" and that "it is modernity itself that will demonstrate (if it has not demonstrated yet) (...) its impossibility" (Bauman, 1993, p. 10). Bauman suggests that we now know what we did not know when we embarked on the modern journey, viz., that "an ethics that is universal and 'objectively founded', is a practical impossibility; perhaps also an *oxymoron*, a contradiction in terms" (Bauman, 1993, p. 10).

For Bauman, then, the postmodern implies the end of *ethics*, both in its pre-modern (religious) and its modern (rational) variety. The end of ethics, however, only signifies the end of *codified* morality. It does not -- or not necessarily -- imply the end of all morality. In connection to this it is important to see that Bauman only claims that the end of (modern) ethics opens up the *possibility* for (postmodern) morality. But there is no guarantee whatsoever that the postmodern 'era' will actually be more moral than the modern one. Bauman stresses again and again that it is only *a chance* and nothing more than that (see, e.g., Bauman, 1998, p. 109). "It remains to be seen," he writes, "whether the time of postmodernity will go down the history as the twilight, or the renaissance, of morality" (Bauman, 1993, p. 3).

Whether the end of ethics will be the beginning of morality is, in other words, a thoroughly *empirical* and *historical* question. But this is not to suggest that we should simply wait for history to happen. On the one hand there are important theoretical questions to be raised about the difference between ethics and morality and about the potential of a postmodern understanding of and approach to morality. On the other hand there are also important questions to be asked about how to understand and evaluate the transformations in (post-)modern society and. Bauman provides important insights for both sets of questions.

2. Rules and responsibility

The central notion in Bauman's articulation of postmodern morality -- or, in his own words: his articulation of "the marks of moral condition, as they appear once contemplated from the postmodern perspective" (Bauman, 1993, p. 10) -- is the idea of *responsibility*. Bauman provides a range of arguments for supporting his claim that responsibility is what postmodern morality is 'about', yet the most convincing argument may well be found in the contention that following the rules, however scrupulously, does not and will never save us from responsibility (see Bauman, 1993, p. 20). We can always ask ourselves and we can always be asked by others whether our following of some set of (ethical) rules is or was the right thing to do -- and we will never have a conclusive answer to that question.

Part of Bauman's discussion of the idea of responsibility is of a historical and sociological nature. In this context Bauman locates the emergence of the idea and of the possibility of responsibility at the beginning of the modern era. The pluralism of modernity, exemplified in "breaking the mould of tradition, escaping the tight and pernickety control of the parish and local community, slackening the grip of ecclesiastical ethical monopoly" had an "emancipatory effect" in that it opened up the possibility for individual choice and hence for individual responsibility (see Bauman, 1993, p. 22). In a sense this already sowed the seeds for the "paradox of the postmodern condition", i.e., the situation in which the fullness of moral choice and responsibility is restored to human beings while they are simultaneously deprived of the comfort of any universal guidance (see 1992, p. xxii). After all, the recognition of individual choice and responsibility could only result in a systematic distrust of *all* authority. "In the end," Bauman writes, "we trust no authority, at least, we trust none fully, and none for long: we cannot help being suspicious about any claim to infallibility" (Bauman, 1993, p. 21). As we have seen, modern ethics sought an exit from this predicament through the invention of a rational ethics. This, so Bauman argues, was part of the more general attempt to bring about a rational society, "(a) society in which Reason, and Reason alone, rules supreme" (Bauman, 1993, p. 31).

The assumption -- and hope -- of this strategy was that the codes and norms of a rational ethics would result in, if not produce morality and moral behavior. The assumption was, in other words, that the codes and norms of a rational ethics would release actors of their responsibility. Yet, so Bauman

argues, "(t)he bid to make individuals universally moral through shifting their moral responsibilities to the legislators failed, as did the promise to make everyone free in the process" (Bauman, 1993, p. 31). At the other end of the modern era we are "back at square one" in that we now know "that we will face forever moral dilemmas without unambiguously good (that is, universally agreed upon, uncontested) solutions, and that we will be never sure where such solutions are to be found; not even whether it would be good to find them" (ibid.).

What postmodernism reveals, in other words, is that moral choices are indeed *choices*, and that moral dilemmas are indeed *dilemmas*, and not "the temporary and rectifiable effects of human weakness, ignorance or blunders" (Bauman, 1993, p. 32). It reveals that moral decisions, unlike abstract ethical principles, are intrinsically ambivalent. Bauman characterizes the postmodern recognition of the 'messiness' of the human world as a *re-enchantment* of this world (Bauman, 1993, p. 33). The postmodern world, Bauman argues, is one "in which *mystery* is no more a barely tolerated alien awaiting a deportation order" (Bauman, 1993, p. 33). It is a world in which we learn to live "with events and acts that are not only not-yet-explained, but (for all we know about what we will ever know) inexplicable" (Bauman, 1993, p. 33).

Some would say -- and this is a recurring them in the writings of all critics of postmodernity and postmodernism -- that the postmodern acceptance of contingency and ambiguity implies the end of morality and even poses a severe threat to the very possibility of human cohabitation as such. Bauman, however, clearly takes the opposite view. He argues that the postmodern re-enchantment of the world carries a chance of readmitting human moral capacity to that world. Not, Bauman stresses, ,so that the world will as a consequence become necessarily better and more hospitable.

> But it will stand a chance of coming to terms with the tough and resilient human proclivities it evidently failed to legislate away -- and of starting from there. (Bauman, 1993, p. 34)

Bauman adds that *perhaps* starting from there "will even make the hope of a more human world more *realistic*" (Bauman, 1993, p. 34).

For Bauman the postmodern re-enchantment of the world leads to a *re-personalization* of

morality (see Bauman, 1993, p. 34). This re-personalization implies returning responsibility "from the finishing line (to which it was exiled) to the starting point (where it is at home) of the ethical process" (Bauman, 1993, p. 34). It is precisely in this sense that *responsibility* becomes the central and all-defining characteristic of the postmodern "morality without an ethical code" (Bauman, 1993, p. 31). Rather, therefore, than destroying morality and moral responsibility, we could say that the postmodern 'condition' at last takes responsibility seriously.

Bauman's sociological/historical account of modernity/postmodernity reveals, so we could summarize, why responsibility is both possible and necessary under the postmodern 'condition'. It is *possible* because postmodernity leaves the belief in the possibility of a universal moral code, and more specifically the codified rational ethics of modernity behind. It is for this very reason, however, than responsibility becomes necessary. This raises the question how we should understand responsibility itself. Is it natural? Is it social? Is it itself universal? Or is it unique? Bauman addresses these question in his discussion of the question about the universality of morality and the question of the foundations of morality. We will discuss these ideas in the next two sections.

3. Postmodern morality and the question of universality

We have seen that Bauman criticizes both pre-modern and modern attempts to codify morality. The main reason for this is that codified ethics takes away individual responsibility -- or at least tries to put ethics in the place of moral responsibility. (We have also seen that Bauman is skeptical about the actual success of such attempts.) Given this we could say that the real 'target' for Bauman is *moral heteronomy*.

The first remark to make in this context is that the typically modern mode of ethics as universal ethics is only one example of an ethics which conceives of morality as heteronomous. Bauman is well aware of the influential role of this position in moral/ethical thought. He finds these ideas for example epitomized in the claim that moral judgements can only be genuine moral judgements if they "pass the test of some universal, extemporal and exterritorial principles" (Bauman, 1993, p. 39). Interestingly enough, however, Bauman argues that what is often taken as an alternative for modern universalism -- and even more often as a postmodern alternative for modern universalism -- namely the group based ethics of communitarianism, lease to a similar form of moral heteronomy as universalism does.

Both position not only differ in their outlook on what it is to be human in that universalists see the self as 'unencumbered' while communitarianists see the self as 'situated'. They also differ in their articulation and justification of what is to be counted as morality and moral behavior. Yet, so Bauman argues, holds, both "deny or at least curtail the individual moral discretion" (Bauman, 1993, p. 46). For Bauman, then, postmodern morality is *not* to be found in the communitarian alternative for modern moral universalism. The crucial distinction for him is between moral autonomy and moral heteronomy. Or to be more precise: Bauman conceives of postmodern morality as moral autonomy. Yet this autonomy is *not* the rational autonomy of the Enlightenment, but something completely different from that. It is the autonomy of moral responsibility. The idea that autonomy can be found in moral responsibility comes from the work of Emmanuel Levinas, which, as will become clear in the following pages, plays a central role in Bauman's explorations of postmodern morality.

One way to make clear where Bauman 'begins' is by saying that for him only an individual can be responsible. Bauman argues that the problem with attempts to codify morality -- either as universal rule or as group rule -- is that the moral 'I' is just being seen as "a singular form of the ethical 'us'" and that "within this ethical 'we', 'I' is exchangeable with 's/he'" (Bauman, 1993, p. 47). Yet in the moral relationship "I and the Other are not exchangeable, and thus cannot be 'added up' to form a plural 'we'" (Bauman, 1993, p. 50). To understand why this is so, we need to take a closer look at the moral relationship or the 'moral party' (Bauman).

A moral relationship, Bauman argues following Levinas, *is* a relationship of responsibility. What makes this relationship a moral relationship as distinct from a contractual relationship, is that responsibility is *not* reciprocal. It is not, Bauman argues, that I am responsible for the other because the other is, will be, or has been responsible for me. Responsibility for the other -- *real* responsibility, so we could say -- is one-sided, non-reciprocal and non-reversible. Bauman puts it as follows:

> I am for the Other whether the Other is for me or not; his being for me is, so to speak, his problem, and whether or how he 'handles' that problem does not in the least affect my being-for-him... Whatever else 'I-for-you' may contain, it does not contain a demand to be repayed, mirrored, or 'balanced out' in the 'you-for-me'. My relation to the other is non-reversible, if it happens to be reciprocated, 'the reciprocation is but an

accident from the point of view of my being for. (Bauman, 1993, p. 50)

It is precisely for the reasons spelled out in these sentences that I and the other are in a radically different position in the moral relationship. I and the other can therefore neither be 'added up' to a 'we', nor are our positions interchangeable.

Bauman argues that the (or better: my) responsibility for the other is always already 'there'. It is *not* a responsibility which follows from my decision to be responsible or not. Bauman stresses that it rather is "the *impossibility* of not being responsible for this Other here and now that constitutes my moral capacity" (Bauman, 1993, p. 53). This is not to say -- and here we may find an important suggestion for moral education -- that everybody will actually *be* responsible. But the point is that in order *not* to be responsible we must 'forget' something. Bauman writes:

> The condition of *not* being haunted by scruples is quite easy to obtain, to be sure. In fact we all obtain it and are in it, most of the time. But 'most of the time' we move outside the realm of moral action into the area where conventions and etiquette, going through the codified and thus easily learnable and readable motions, as well as the simple rule of respecting the other's privacy ... will do. The rest of the time, though, we are in morally charged situations, and that means being on our own. (Bauman, 1993, pp. 53-54, n 19)

While rules can be universal, responsibility is by its very 'nature' non-universal, singular, unique. One may say, Bauman writes, that the moral is "what resists codification, formalization, socialization, universalization" (Bauman, 1993, p. 54). The moral is what remains when the job of ethics is done.

With respect to the question of the (alleged) universality of morality Bauman further argues that if morality would be universalizable, it should have possessed the following three attributes: (1) purpose, (2) reciprocity, and (3) the ability to be the object of a contract. With respect to (1) 'purpose' Bauman observes that many have tried to find the purpose of morality. The most popular candidates presumably are self-preservation and survival. If morality would have a purpose, being moral would 'make sense' and would even be 'rational'. Calculation would then precede morality. But, asks Bauman,

doesn't morality and more specifically moral responsibility cease to be moral at the very moment that it becomes a means to achieve an end (Bauman, 1993, p. 56)?

With respect to (2) 'reciprocity' Bauman notes that if morality would be reciprocal it would indeed be possible to universalize it. After all, if we all would know what to do and if it would be the case that doing what we should do is the same for all, that we would all have the same duties, then we could simply spell out this duties. Yet the very point of being responsible, according to Bauman, is that my responsibility is not dependent on the other's past, present, anticipated or hoped-for reciprocation. For similar reason morality can also not be the subject of (3) a contract. The gist of a contract, Bauman argues, "is that the duties of all partners have been negotiated *before* any action is undertaken" (Bauman, 1993, p. 58), which again does away with responsibility. For these reasons, then, Bauman concludes that morality is not universalizable.

There is, however, one further important conclusion which Bauman draws from these observations. What is implied in the idea that moral actions are purposeful, reciprocal and contractual is that our moral actions follow from our conscious and deliberate decisions. It is assumed, in other words, "that thinking precedes doing" (Bauman, 1993, p. 59). Thinking of moral action as purposeful, reciprocal and contractual assumes, in other words, that we can approach morality in terms of (rational) means-ends deliberation. Yet this assumption is precisely not valid in the case of moral actions (see ibid.) Bauman concludes, therefore, that morality is "endemically and irredeemably *non-rational* -- in the sense of not being calculable" (Bauman, 1993, p. 60). The 'moral call' rather is thoroughly personal, it appeals to *my* responsibility, which means that "I am moral *before* I think" (Bauman, 1993, p. 61).

To summarize: A significant feature of postmodern morality therefore is that it is *non-*universalizable. This, however, is not an endorsement of moral relativism. Bauman opposes both universal and group-based ethics and the reason for this is that *both* substitute "heteronomous, enforced-from-outside, ethical rules for the autonomous responsibility of the moral self" (Bauman, 1993, p. 12), which comes down to nothing less than an "incapacitation, even a destruction of the moral self" (ibid.).

The overall effect is not so much the 'universalization of morality', as the silencing of

> moral impulse and channeling of moral capacities to socially designed targets that may, and do, include immoral purposes. (Bauman, 1993, p. 12)

Bauman further stresses that (postmodern) morality is inherently *non-rational* in that it does not fit the means-ends scheme. This is not only because at the center of morality we find a responsibility which is neither purposeful, nor reciprocal, nor contractual. It is also because in morality thinking does not precede action. It is not, therefore, as if we can choose to be responsible for the other or not. Bauman rather holds that 'being responsible for the other' *is* our/the human 'condition'. The central idea, in other words, is "that moral responsibility -- being *for* the Other before one can be *with* the Other -- is the first reality of the self" (Bauman, 1993, p. 13). This does raise questions, however, about what comes first and how or in what way it comes first. It raises questions, in other words, about the foundations -- if any -- of morality.

4. Postmodern morality and the question of foundations

Since morality is responsibility the question of the foundation of morality is the question of the foundation of the responsible moral self. To this question Bauman has a clear and unambiguous answer: the moral self "is a self with no foundation" (Bauman, 1993, p. 62). Bauman explores the meaning and impact of this claim along two, slightly different lines.

Part of the discussion -- and this is the first line -- centers around the idea of the moral self having a 'moral impulse' as a ground on which to stand. This moral impulse has, however, at least been discredited and more often been denied any moral significance in modern ethical thought. "Philosophers and the administrators alike," he writes, have viewed the moral impulse "with considerable suspicion" (Bauman, 1993, p. 62). He shows how modern ethical thought starts from a profound *distrust* of the moral capacities of the individual and that for that reason they thought that the moral impulse needed to be replaced, or at least supplemented by something else. Bentham argued, for example, that "human beings are ... deficient in altruism and therefore require the threat of coercion to encourage them to seek majority interests rather than their own" (Bauman, 1993, p. 64). Kant, to name another example, "axiomatically assumed that feelings, much as acting out of affections, have no moral significance" and therefore sought to replace impulse by "*reason-dictated rules*" and "*rules-guided*

reason" (Bauman, 1993, p. 67).

> In fact, virtue itself meant for Kant and his followers the ability to stand up to one's emotive inclinations, and to neutralize or reject them in the name of reason. (Bauman, 1993, p. 67).

Kant's fear of emotions haunted his search for moral autonomy. He saw following the emotions as *unfreedom* and sought to find moral freedom in following the rules of reason. Bauman clearly takes the opposite view in thinking about where to locate autonomy. For him the "search that starts from the disbelief in the self's moral *capacity* ends up in the denial of the self's *right* to moral judgement" (Bauman, 1993, p. 69).

The (modern) search for the foundations of morality was, thus, motivated by a distrust in the moral capacities of the moral self. On the one hand this mistrust had a philosophical background in that is was assumed that (1) anything that is beyond 'our' control is unfreedom, and (2) that reason can, in principle, control our emotions, feelings and affections and, along those lines, lead us to freedom. There was, however, also a more practical and political concern in that it was assumed -- and feared -- that when morality would simply be left to individuals and their inclinations "everything may happen" (Bauman, 1993, p. 62). So 'coercion' (Bentham) and 'reason' (Kant) were not only two philosophical answers to the question of morality; they were also two strategies to domesticate and control the (uncontrollable) moral impulse. The question of the foundation of morality -- if any -- was therefore also related to a very practical problem, viz., that of social order and social stability.

The other line along which Bauman discusses the question of the foundation of morality goes back to Levinas. The central idea is the claim that the question of foundations makes not sense -- more literally: has no meaning -- when talking about morality and responsibility. Bauman's point is, so we could say, that talking about the foundations of morality is a category mistake.

The question of the foundations of morality -- but for that reason any questions about foundations -- is an *ontological* question. It is a question about 'what is', and more specifically about what is 'below' or what comes 'before' morality. But, so Bauman argues, if we try to conceive of our relation with others in those terms, we will never find morality. One reason for this has a respectable

tradition in philosophy: we can never derive any 'ought' from 'is'. Another way of putting it is that ontology constitutes my relation to the other as a question of knowledge (of the other) first, and not as a question of morality and responsibility. Levinas makes this point (explicitly criticizing Heidegger) by saying that in the realm of ontology we are (only) *with* others (Heidegger's 'Miteinandersein'). This 'with', however, does not constitute a moral relationship, a relationship of responsibility. Whoever starts from ontology, Bauman summarizes, "does not embark on founding morality" (Bauman, 1993, p. 71).

> One embarks instead on disqualifying morality as 'given' before being and before facts, and hence renders its replacement with Law and Law-like Ethics a foregone conclusion. (Bauman, 1993, p. 71)

The only way to 'escape' this predicament, so we could say, is to think of the foundation of morality differently, i.e., *not* in the language of ontology. This means that the only way to escape the problem of trying to reduce morality to ontology -- and thereby 'losing' is -- is by assuming that morality is *before* ontology. This is precisely the point that Levinas makes.

> (I)t must be understood that morality comes not as a secondary layer, above an abstract reflection on the totality and its dangers; morality has an independent and preliminary range. First philosophy is an ethics... (Levinas, quoted in Bauman, 1993, p. 71)

The idea of 'ethics as first philosophy' can, of course, be easily misread. 'First', after all, implies time, history, origin, and it is for that reason a thoroughly ontological category. Bauman stresses, therefore, that the 'before' of the moral condition has to be understood as a "*non-ontological* before" (Bauman, 1993, p. 72), as a condition 'otherwise than being' or 'beyond essence' (Levinas). But what can 'before' mean as it doesn't indicate a temporal 'before'? Bauman suggests to read 'before' as 'better' (Bauman, 1993, p. 72). He writes:

> And so morality is posited here not as a hero of etiological myth, not as an imaginary 'primordial' being of sorts, not as a different kind of being. (Bauman, 1993, p. 72).

Morality becomes the *transcendence* of being, it is a "defiance of being" (Bauman, 1993, p. 72).

This line of thought may seem to suggest that the foundation of morality is to be found in the subject's *decision* to be responsible. While there is indeed a sense in which taking up one's responsibility is a crucial step in Bauman's account of morality (one which in this respect closely follows Levinas's ideas), it is *not* the case that responsibility only *emerges* from the subject's decision. Again Bauman's quote of Levinas is instructive.

> The responsibility for the other can not have begun in my commitment, in my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the other side of my freedom, from a 'prior to every meaning'... (Levinas, quoted in Bauman, 1993, p. 74).

The question whether or not one is responsible for the other, Bauman adds, only has meaning if one supposes "that the ego is concerned only with itself" (Bauman, 1993, p. 75). In that case it would indeed have to be the subject's decision to become responsible. Bauman, following Levinas, sees it precisely the other way around.

'Taking responsibility', 'being moral' is, then, a recognition of one's 'primordial' responsibility, not a decision to become responsible. Bauman -- still following Levinas -- compares the process to an 'awakening' from one's 'egology', or, more poignantly, a 'sobering up' (see Bauman, 1993, p. 76).

In this process the self awakens or comes 'into presence' (see Biesta, 1999). This is not to be understood as a process in which we become 'who we are'. It is not, in other words, about 'identity'. The idea is that it is in this situation that the 'I' comes into being as a *unique* I, and it's unicity has everything to do with the fact that *I* am responsible for the other and that nobody can take this responsibility from me (see also Biesta, in press). Moral responsibility, Bauman summarizes, "is the first reality of the self" (Bauman, 1993, p. 13), it is "the act of self-constitution' (Bauman, 1993, p. 14).

On the basis of the foregoing observations Bauman concludes that the foundation of morality -- if we still would want to make use of that concept -- might best be understood as to be found in "moral anxiety" (Bauman, 1993, p. 80). It is moral anxiety "that provides the only substance the moral self could every have" (Bauman, 1993, p. 80). It all adds up to the fact that a person can never be entirely

sure that she has acted in the right manner. Responsibility can never be known to be fulfilled. It is this 'uncertainty with no exit' (Bauman) which precisely is the foundation of morality.

> One recognizes morality by its gnawing sense of unfulfilledness, by its endemic dissatisfaction with itself. *The moral self is a self always haunted by the suspicion that it is not moral enough.* (Bauman, 1993, p. 80)

5. Morality, proximity, and modernity

So far we have discussed two 'components' of Bauman's position. We started with his account of the emergence of ethics in the modern era. From there we moved to a -- mainly philosophical -- account of what a morality-without-rules could mean. While the latter has provided us with an understanding of what morality could be if it is *not* conceived of as an ethics, the question that still needs to be answered is the more practical question to what extent, if any, this idea of morality actually 'exists' or can or might exist. The question, to put it differently, is what the actual opportunities for morality are in contemporary society. This is much more a sociological than a philosophical question. While this moves us slightly beyond the focus of this paper in that it is not about a postmodern *conception* of morality in the strict sense, Bauman's ideas are important, not in the least, so we want to argue, from an education point op view.

Bauman tackles the question about the 'possibilities' for morality in contemporary society in two different though related ways. On the one hand he focuses on morality and society in general; on the other hand he discusses the chances for morality in (post)modern society.[5] Bauman takes his starting point for these sociological deliberations in another Levinasian key-idea, viz. that of 'proximity.

For Levinas, as we have seen, morality concerns the relationship between two beings -- and not more than two -- one being responsible for the other. Bauman aptly speaks of the 'moral party of two'. One way in which Levinas expresses the 'unique quality' of the moral relationship is with the idea of 'proximity' (see Bauman, 1993, pp. 86-87). Bauman explains that proximity is not about physical space. It does not refer to a shortening of distance. It should rather be understood as a "suppression of distance" (Bauman, 1993, p. 87). This suppression is, however, not an act. Proximity is more like 'attention' or 'waiting' (see Bauman, 1993, p. 87). Proximity, Bauman writes, is

> neither a distance to be bridged, nor a distance demanding to be bridged. (...) Proximity is satisfied with being what it is -- proximity. (...) (T)he state of permanent attention, come what may. Responsibility never completed, never exhausted, never past. (Bauman, 1993, p. 88)

Seen in this way we could say that 'proximity' describes the predicament of being in the moral situation and of being a moral self. It describes at the same time the specific *quality* of the moral situation, of the moral part of two, and something like the *condition* upon which morality might become possible, might 'happen'. The latter can be inferred from Bauman's observation that proximity ends, disappears, dissolves as soon as I take up (my) responsibility. The reason for this is that in order to enter the realm of moral action, in order to take up responsibility, I need to decide -- and hence to represent -- what my responsibility is, i.e., what the other 'needs' or 'wants from me'. Precisely at that moment *in*attention takes the place of attention, *im*patience replaces waiting (see Bauman, 1993, p. 89). We enter, says Bauman, the realm of being, "*otherwise* than morality" (Bauman, 1993, p. 89).

Since morality only exists in the moral party of two, the situation dramatically changes when a third person enters the scene, that is when 'society' appears. Now "the naive, un-ruled and unruly moral impulse -- that both necessary and sufficient condition of the 'moral party' -- does not suffice anymore" (Bauman, 1993, p. 112). Bauman -- still following Levinas on this -- describes the entrance of the third as the end of proximity and hence as the end of morality. The third introduces objectivity into the situation because we can no longer rely upon the immediate, one-to-one responsibility for the other. Society needs, Bauman suggests, "norms, laws, ethical rules and course of justice" (Bauman, 1993, p. 114). Bauman basically sees this necessity as a *loss*. He writes:

> Objectivity, the gift of the Third, has delivered a mortal, and at least potentially terminal, blow to the affection which moved the moral partners. (Bauman, 1993, p. 114)

The 'Other' now dissolves in the 'Many', and the first thing to dissolve is what Levinas calls the 'Face',

i.e., the otherness of the Other, and hence morality, that is "the responsibility for that otherness"(see Bauman, 1993, p. 130). In this situation we need help and the name of that help, according Bauman, is 'society' (Bauman, 1993, p. 116). Yet society offers its help in two different ways. Or, to put it differently, society 'consists' of two different processes -- Bauman calls them *socialization* and *sociality* -- which both, in a different way, offer 'help' when morality is no longer possible.[6]

Socialization and *sociality* might best be understood as two different reactions of society to the 'fact' of the moral impulse; reactions, more specifically, to the spontaneity and unpredictability of this impulse. *Socialization*, so we could say, is the attempt to domesticate the moral impulse, to provide structure to society, or to see society as structure (Bauman, 1993, p. 123). Bauman discerns three ways in which "the disruptive and deregulating impact of moral impulse" *can* be neutralized by society and also actually *has* been neutralized by (modern) society.

(1) The first is that of "assuring that there is *distance*, not *proximity* between the two poles of action -- the 'doing' and the 'suffering' one" (Bauman, 1993, p. 125). It is, in other words, "the removal of effects of action beyond the reach of moral limits" (Bauman, 1993, p. 125). This is the situation where actors are/have become only one part of a long chain and where they only see -- and have 'control' over -- the next link, but can neither see nor control the ultimate and overall aims. In such a situation the moral capacity of the actor, now prevented from interfering with the overall aim and outcome, is deployed in the service of the *efficiency* of the process (see Bauman, 1993, p. 126). The moral focus shifts, in other words, to the "loyalty to the mates" (Bauman, 1993, p. 126) -- a development which "reinforces discipline and willingness to cooperate" (Bauman, 1993, p. 127) but at the same time stifles responsibility.

(2) The second 'arrangement' consists of exempting some 'others' "from the class of potential objects of moral responsibility" (Bauman, 1993, p. 125) -- a process which Bauman calls *de-humanization*. What happens here is that those who are at 'the receiving end of action' are *denied* the capacity to be moral subjects and are "thus disallowed from mounting a moral challenge against the intentions and effects of the action" (Bauman, 1993, p. 127).

(3) The third 'arrangement' is that where the object of action is disassembled into 'traits', so that it no longer appears as a (potentially) moral self. In this case actions become targeted to specific traits but not to the person as a whole - as a result of which an encounter with that whole person is unlikely

to happen.

Bauman stresses that these 'arrangements' are not simply strategies that have been or can be deployed in order to make morality more difficult or to make morality disappear -- although they can be used as such. They are also simply the 'effects' of socialization, the 'effects' of society's attempt to become more structured, more organized and more ordered. They are effects, so we could say, of 'societization', the process of becoming a (structured, ordered) society.

Bauman also stresses that while these arrangements do not promote immoral behavior, and in that respect could be called 'neutral', they do not promote good behavior either. They rather render social action morally "adiaphoric', i.e., morally indifferent (see Bauman, 1993, p. 125). The overall effect of socialization is what Bauman describes as an 'out-rationalizing' of the moral impulse (see Bauman, 1993, p. 119).

The process of *sociality*, on the other hand, results in 'out-aesthetizing' of the moral impulse (see Bauman, 1993, p. 129). Sociality is, in a sense, everything that socialization is not. Sociality

> puts uniqueness above regularity and the sublime above the rational, being therefore generally inhospitable to rules... (Bauman, 1993, p. 119).

While with sociality there is no danger of rules, laws and structures trying to domesticate and out-rationalizing the moral impulse, the process nonetheless poses a threat to proximity. The main point of sociality, of the 'celebration of spontaneity', is that it brings individuals together in what Bauman calls the 'crowd'. The 'crowd' is the situation where individuals simply 'do' and 'are'. It brings, says Bauman, "the comfort of non-decision and non-uncertainty" (Bauman, 1993, p. 132). It is for that reason that in the 'crowd' the question of responsibility will simply never arise (see Bauman, 1993, p. 132).

This means that as for the outcome both processes are much the same in that they both result in heteronomy -- heteronomy of rules or heteronomy of crowds -- taking the place of the autonomy of the moral self (see Bauman, 1993, p. 32). He writes:

> Neither ... socialization of society nor the sociality of the crowd, tolerate moral independence. Both explore and obtain obedience -- though one be design, the other by

> default. Neither reason ... nor passion seething in the togetherness of the crowd, help the self to be moral; the only ... help the self to survive in the wide, strange world that has no home for morality. (Bauman, 1993, p. 132)

In a sense we now have come full circle in that we can say that the major tendency of modernity with respect to morality has been that of socialization. For Bauman after all modernity is/was the era of *ethics*, the era of codified, structured, regulated morality. In this respect Bauman also offers a moral diagnosis of modernity -- or a diagnosis of modern morality -- in that he shows how the process of socialization (which is the more encompassing attempt of society to structure, order and control), makes proximity, and hence responsibility, more and more difficult. Although the stress in Bauman's analysis is on the effects of socialization, we can also deduce from Bauman's writings that we should not think of sociality as the process which can save morality from the 'iron grip' of socialization. Sociality appears as the other 'dangerous extreme' of social life, the other threat to morality. Socialization is, perhaps, the most obvious and most visible 'enemy' of Bauman's postmodern morality -- which makes it even more important also to be aware of the dangers of sociality.

Against this background we can further say -- and this is the final remark in our reconstruction of Bauman's ideas -- that morality may have become difficult under conditions of (modern) life, but it has not become impossible. Bauman argues that fortunately for humanity though not always for the moral self, "the moral conscience", that "ultimate prompt of moral impulse and root of moral responsibility -- has only been *anaesthesized*, not amputated" (Bauman, 1993, p. 249). Bauman clearly puts his hope and faith in the possibility that moral conscience is only dormant and therefore, in principle, be awakened. Conscience is, to be sure, extremely weak. It can "neither convince nor coerce" (Bauman, 1993, p. 249). It may therefore strike the modern mind as 'preposterous' to suggest that conscience is "humanity's only warrant and hope" (Bauman, 1993, p. 249). Yet it seems to be the only possibility we have to at least to be able to expose -- without any guarantee whatsoever -- both the immorality of codified morality and the immorality of the norms of the majority. "(W)e have," Bauman therefore concludes, "little choice but to place our bet on that conscience which, however wan, alone can instill the responsibility for disobeying the command to do evil" (Bauman, 1993, p. 250).

DISCUSSION

In the final section of this paper we want to focus on the four issues that we identified in our first paper as being central to the current research field in moral development and education. Rather than 'translating' Bauman into a theory of moral development and/or moral education -- which is the much larger task that we envisage to address in the third part of our project -- we want to *explore what* Bauman's ideas have to say about the four issues so as to get a first indication of the value of his work. We will first make some comments around the four issues. In the final paragraph we will give a brief evaluation of Bauman's possible contribution to our overall project.

1. The moral domain

The first thing that can be inferred from Bauman's writings is that he wants to make a sharp distinction between the realm of social convention and the realm of morality. There is not only a *historical* reason for this in that he claims that (pre-modern and modern) attempts to codify what moral behavior is, have simply failed ("an ethics that is universal and 'objectively founded', is a practical impossibility"). Bauman also argues that morality never can and never will be exhausted by ethics ("following the rules ... will never save us from responsibility") and that in that sense an ethics that is universal and objectively founded is an *oxymoron*.

We could say that Bauman wants to 'save' morality from ethics. He characterizes ethics as the situation of moral *heteronomy*. What he is looking for is moral *autonomy*. Contrary to the modern approach, however, Bauman argues that moral autonomy is *not* to be found in a reason-based morality that is meant to overcome the moral impulse. For Bauman the distinction between heteronomy and autonomy does *not* coincide with the distinction between feelings and impulses versus reason. Bauman characterizes reason-based morality as heteronomous, so we could say, because of its pretension to be able to produce 'good conscience'. Reason-based morality leads us away from our responsibility. What characterizes the moral domain, according to Bauman, is precisely an unconditional and infinite responsibility for the other.

We could say, therefore, that Bauman's conception of morality is *post-conventional*. But it is

important to see that for him going beyond conventions is *not* a movement towards universal or universalizable ethical principles. Bauman's conception of morality is post-conventional in that there will never be a conclusive answer to the question whether we -- or better: I -- have done 'enough'. It seems to us that this question is not only a question about (personal) responsibility but is evenly valid for those who think of morality in terms of justice. We do not think that Bauman's postmodern position places him on the 'care/responsibility' end of a spectrum where the other end is about 'justice/rights' (the 'Kohlberg-Gilligan' debate). We do not think, to put it differently, that Bauman's is a version of an 'ethics of care'. The distinction he argues for, is not one of (psychological) motivation and orientation but concerns the definition of the moral 'phenomenon' itself.

2. The question of 'is' and 'ought'

The question of the relationship between 'is' and 'ought' is a long standing problem in moral philosophy. The problem about how to conceive of this relationship, and more specifically of how to bridge the gap between and how to get from 'is' to 'ought', plays a central role in the research on moral development and moral education, primarily around questions of justification and evaluation. In a sense, so we could say, Bauman accepts that there is a gap between 'is' and 'ought', a gap which is unbridgeable. But what is interesting and radically new about the position Bauman presents, is that he doesn't seek a passage from 'is' to 'ought', from ontology to morality, but argues for the fundamental position of morality. In a sense he argues that morality is primary and ontology only secondary -- although he continuously reminds us that 'primary' and 'secondary' themselves only make sense within an ontological framework, for which reason he suggests that the 'primary' character of morality should be understood as 'better' than being, as a transcendence of being (although one could still argue that 'transcendence' only has meaning in ontology), as a 'defiance of being'. (Levinas calls the human a 'scandal' in the realm of being.)

This approach opens up the possibility for thinking differently about the foundations of morality -- and in the foregoing discussion we have already argued that it neither leads to decisionism nor to relativism but rather situates the 'foundation' (if we would still want to use that word) in 'moral anxiety'. What Bauman's (Levinassian) reversal of ontology and morality implies for the many detailed philosophical discussions about 'is' and 'ought' remains to be seen. (It is a well question beyond the

scope of this paper.) One thing which, so we believe, is not yet resolved in Bauman's own writings, is a possible tension between his 'reversal' of ontology and morality on the one hand, and the (quasi?) psychological phenomena of 'moral impulse' and 'moral anxiety' on the other. It is not completely clear yet whether the latter phenomena should be read as an attempt to find some 'ground' -- although weak and feeble -- for morality and hence as an attempt to 'naturalize' and 're-ontologize' morality, or whether it should simply be understood as a redescription of the phenomenon of 'morality'. It does indicate that although understanding morality pre- or non-ontologically opens up fascinating perspectives, it remains extremely difficult to do so consistently.

3. Moral motivation and moral action

The previous remarks are closely related to the question of moral motivation and moral action. If we look at Bauman from the point of view of Kohlberg's claim that action can only be moral if it is motivated by moral cognition (i.e., moral judgement) we can immediately see that Bauman appears at the other end of a possible spectrum. Bauman seems to be much closer to those who argue that moral motivation is not a cognitive or rational matter, but has to do with moral emotions (such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, shame and guilt).

But this is only part of the picture, because Bauman -- following Levinas -- in a sense presents a much moral radical view with his claims that 'moral responsibility is the first reality of the self' and that 'moral responsibility *is* the act of self-constitution'. In this sense he seems to suggest that there is no self that has to be motivated in order to *become* responsible and moral. The self only comes into presence as a result of being responsible or 'taking up' its responsibility.

What is at least -- and we're inclined to say unambiguously -- clear from Bauman's writings is that he conceives of morality as non-rational.[7] Reason, as we have seen, is about making 'correct decisions' and brings morality us into the realm of means and ends. But Bauman argues that moral responsibility cannot be captured in means-ends terms (which was the main reason for suggesting that morality is without purpose, non-reciprocal and non-contractual).

The question that remains to be solved is to what extent Bauman's remarks are 'only' philosophical with no bearing upon psychology. The questions is, to put it differently, whether Bauman's remarks about the constitution of the self should only be understood as a *definition* of the

self (and implied in it a 'definition' of morality), or whether they also say something about the (psychological) constitution of selfhood, of an 'empirical' self. Bauman's discussion of the notion of 'proximity' -- especially in the context of his critique of modern society -- suggests that his remarks can be read more 'empirically' or 'psychologically' (although we also found a tension in his account of 'sociality').[8] In that way his position would come closer to a conception of morality in which moral emotions play a central role. But even then it would still be the question whether we can think of such emotions as 'motivating' action or whether Bauman's approach is 'beyond' such a 'motivation-action'-scheme.

4. Moral relativism

It is clear that Bauman argues strongly against the alleged universality of morality. The moral, for Bauman, is what resists universalization. But interestingly enough Bauman rejects the idea that this should mean that his conception is relativistic. The communitarian relativism of group-based rules is, for Bauman, just another example of moral heteronomy, and in that sense it does not differ from ethical universalism. As Bauman puts it, the postmodern perspective of morality does not reveal the relativism of morality, but rather exposes "the parochiality of *ethical* codes that pretend to be universal", so that it becomes clear that it is "the ethical codes which are plagued by relativism" (1993, p. 14).

For Bauman the central concern remains with the 'autonomy' of the 'moral self' -- an autonomy which should not be understood as rational autonomy, not even as an autonomy based upon the sovereign decision of a pre-moral subject. It is rather the autonomy of the moral impulse which goes against and beyond reason and rules. In a sense we could say that Bauman's conception of morality as moral responsibility is 'objective' in that it is detached from and goes against reason and group-rule. But this objectivity is definitely not a cognitive objectivity, or an objectivity of moral standards.

Bauman's main contribution to this part of the discussion can therefore be said to rest in his questioning both of universalism-relativism as a dichotomy, and of the way in which positions have been or are labeled as either being universal or relativistic. In that respect he shows that a (or at least his) postmodern perspective is not relativistic but rather challenges the terms of the very discussion about universalism and relativism.

5. Concluding remarks

The foregoing comments only give an indication of what a 'Baumanian' approach might contribute to the field of moral development and education and we are well aware that this paper only provides the beginning for such a discussion. In conclusion we want to make three more general remarks.

The first has to do with the status of Bauman's writings. One problem we encountered in reconstruction his ideas was that a major part of his philosophical investigations into morality are very close to the work of Levinas. On the one hand this raises the question whether Bauman's interpretation of Levinas is 'correct'. On the other hand it also raises the question whether it makes sense to read Bauman or whether we should go -- or should have gone -- to Levinas directly. While there definitely is a need to take a closer look at Levinas's writings, we do feel that Bauman's contribution is more than an interpretation of Levinas.

What, secondly, is special and distinctive about Bauman's 'postmodern-ethics-which-is-not-an-ethics' is that he reads Levinas through a sociological lens, which allows him to show how (modern) social life poses a threat to proximity -- itself a crucial 'condition' for morality and responsibility. This, as we have argued, provides an interesting critique of (modern) social life, although the crucial question remains whether it is a critique of social life as such or whether it can be directed against certain tendencies in the process of modernization.

If, thirdly, we take the latter approach, we can begin to see a direction for a postmodern approach to moral education. Such an approach will definitely not be concerned with installing appropriate moral behavior *nor* with finding the 'right' (motivating) reasons for moral action. It will rather take its clue from Bauman's considerations about the 'conditions' for proximity and may want to focus on how something like 'moral anxiety' -- "the only substance the moral self could every have" (Bauman) -- might be 'awakened'. What this would mean in the practice of moral education and what it would imply for our conceptions of moral development, remains to be seen.

Endnotes

1. A copy of this manuscript is available from the authors.

2. Given the complexity of the ideas that we want to represent and discuss in the second part of our project, we will discuss the ideas of Critchley in a separate paper. It is still to be decided whether it is sufficient to read postmodern/poststructural ethical philosophy 'through' the writings of Bauman and Critchley, or whether we need to extend this part of our research to the writings of Levinas, Løgstrup and Derrida (and perhaps others we encounter on our way). Initial explorations of Levinas's and Derrida's work have been given in Biesta, 1998; 1999; 2001; in press[a]; in press [b]).

3. This section is primarily based on a close reading of Bauman, 1993.

4. One of the key-questions in the many discussions about 'postmodernity' is whether this refers to an (objective) 'condition' or whether it is an interpretation and/or evaluation of developments in (contemporary) society/societies (see Biesta, 1995). In some places Bauman tends more to the first, suggesting that we now live in a postmodern era and/or a postmodern culture (see, e.g., 1992, pp. 31-34). In other places, however, he emphasizes the second approach, referring to postmodernity as a 'world-view' (ibid., p. 35) or a 'state of mind' (ibid., p. vii). In an interview from 1999 Bauman makes clear that he intended to use 'postmodernity' as "a new perspective (...) which one may use to turn modernity around and bring into vision what otherwise would remain unseen" (Beilharz, 2001, p. 339). He also refers here to his definition of postmodernity as "'modernity minus its illusion' -- modernity coming to terms with its own un-fulfilment and un-fulfillability" (ibid.). Yet in the same interview Bauman also uses phrases like 'light' or 'liquefied modernity' to characterize "our kind of social condition" (ibid.). While there is, therefore, some ambivalence in Bauman's use of the concept, it is at least clear (as we will discuss below) that for Bauman postmodernity is not simply a chronological concept, not simply signifying what comes 'after' modernity with no other relation to modernity than a temporal one.

5. See also our comments in note 2.

6. It is important to note at this point that Bauman is not completely clear about the status of (his account) of these two processes. In some places he presents them as a typology of society as such; in other places he gives the impression that it is an account of *modern* society. In the first interpretation Bauman's argument -- as will become clear below -- reads as the contention that morality *necessarily* disappears when we move from the moral party of two to society. The second interpretation reads Bauman as saying that morality has become difficult in modern society, but with the implication that it is still, at least in principle, possible. We believe that the latter interpretation is at least possible and is definitely the more interesting interpretation, not only because it provides a framework for a rather strong critique of modernity from the point of view of morality, but also because it suggests a 'way out', or at least indicates a direction.

7. The following passage gives a very clear summary of Bauman's ideas. "(M)oral issues cannot be 'resolved', nor the moral life of humanity guaranteed, by the calculating and legislative efforts of reason.

Morality is not safe in the hands of reason, though this is exactly what spokesmen of reason promise. Reason cannot help the moral self without depriving the self of what makes the self moral: that unfounded, non-rational, un-arguable, no-excuses-given, and non-calculable urge to stretch towards the other, to caress, to be for, to live for, happen what may. Reason is about making correct decisions, while moral responsibility precedes all thinking about decisions as it does not, and cannot care about any logic which would allow the approval of an action as correct. Thus, morality can be 'rationalized; only at the cost of self-denial and self-attrition. From that reason-assisted self-denial, the self emerges morally disarmed, unable (and unwilling) to face up to the multitude of moral challenges and cacophony of ethical prescriptions. At the far end of the long march of reason, moral nihilism waits: that moral nihilism which in its deepest essence means not the denial of binding ethical code, and not the blunders of relativistic theory -- but the loss of the ability to be moral." (Bauman, 1993, pp. 247-248)

8. For a reading of Levinasian ideas which goes more into that direction, see Biesta, 1999.

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